

Executive Summary

In Fall 2009, the California State Legislature passed a comprehensive package reforming governance of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta) and related aspects of statewide water management. In Section 85301 of Senate Bill X7-1 (Delta Reform Act of 2009), the Legislature charged the Delta Protection Commission (DPC) with developing:

“A proposal to protect, enhance, and sustain the unique cultural, historical, recreational, agricultural, and economic values of the Delta as an evolving place....The Commission shall include in the proposal a plan to establish state and federal designation of the Delta as a place of special significance, which may include application for a federal designation of the Delta as a National Heritage Area.”

This feasibility study has been undertaken in order to fulfill this legislative mandate, which upon acceptance of this study by the DPC, it will be submitted to a Delta Congressional Representative to introduce legislation to establish a Delta National Heritage Area (NHA). The study inventories and describes resources of the region which are supportive of the proposed NHA's story and themes that make the area a place of national significance. The study also proposes how the NHA will be managed and organized to coordinate heritage area activities. Additionally, local groups who support the NHA are listed, along with letters of support; and organizations who are interested in potentially serving as partners on NHA activities are described, along with letters of partnership commitment.

During the course of this process a separate effort was initiated to establish a Delta NHA. In January 2011, Senator Dianne Feinstein introduced legislation into the Senate, with companion legislation introduced by Congressman John Garamendi into the House of Representatives to designate a Delta NHA, with the DPC as the management entity. The DPC has been monitoring the progress of this legislation while continuing to work on this feasibility study.

A NHA is a place designated by the United States Congress where natural, cultural, historical and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally-distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography. These areas tell nationally important stories about our nation and are representative of the national experience through both the physical features that remain and the traditions that have evolved within them.

The DPC developed this study with a process that incorporated public involvement throughout its entirety. A variety of activities were undertaken to acquire stakeholder input, including: public meetings, public presentations, stakeholder interviews, public review memos, and project study team meetings.

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Proposed mission and vision statements for a Delta NHA have been developed as part of this study. The proposed mission is to: “recognize, enhance, and promote ‘Delta as a Place’ to help cultivate and retain appreciation and understanding of the Delta as an ecological, agricultural, recreational, historical, and cultural treasure”. The proposed vision is “a regional network of partner sites with interpretive/educational components that will be linked where possible and serve as the primary attractions, on existing public properties or on private properties with the voluntary consent and involvement of the landowners”.

Project goals have also been established. The first goal is to “identify the Delta as a region of national significance to educate the public about ‘Delta as a Place’, and build more support for preserving, protecting, and enhancing the Delta”. Other goals are related to economic development, public access, historic preservation, interpretation, and more.

Utilizing public input, five proposed themes have been developed which explain the Delta’s national significance:

1. At the heart of California lies America’s inland delta.
2. Conversion of the Delta from marshland to farmland was one of the largest reclamation projects in the United States.
3. Multi-cultural contributions and experiences have shaped the Delta’s rural landscape.
4. The Delta, California’s cornucopia, is amongst the most fertile agricultural regions in the world.
5. The Delta lies at the center of California’s water resource challenges.

This study discusses four management alternatives and the potential implications: current practices; a Delta NHA; a state designated Delta heritage corridor; and a locally designated Delta Heritage Area.

Two boundary alternatives were proposed in this process. The first boundary alternative was developed by the DPC through identification of the geographical range of heritage resources which support the proposed themes. This boundary alternative includes the Delta’s Primary Zone, as well as add-ons which are adjacent to the Primary Zone. The second alternative is the boundary included in the Delta NHA legislation that was introduced in 2011 by Senator Feinstein and Congressman Garamendi, and includes much of the Legal Delta as well as the Carquinez Strait and Suisun Marsh.


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Based on public input, DPC staff recommends the second boundary alternative with the addition of the City of Rio Vista.

Heritage resources which support the NHA include waterways, levees, natural habitat areas, farmlands, historical and cultural sites, public lands with public access, and recreational resources. This study includes inventory lists, maps and descriptions of these sites.

This study proposes the DPC as the management entity with Technical and Stakeholder Advisory Committees to bring diverse perspectives and expertise to NHA planning and management. Fundraising efforts could be carried out in collaboration with local partners, and a funding matrix illustrates potential sources that could be investigated to meet the required federal match. An overview is given on current DPC projects that are compatible with the NHA. Project supporters are listed, potential project partners are explained, and letters of support and partnership commitment are included.

Measurements to ensure full protection of private property rights are explained which include the enabling legislation, opt-out provisions, existing Right-to-Farm ordinances, and the DPC's Land Use and Resource Management Plan. Finally, the feasibility of a Delta NHA is discussed in the context of the federal NHA criteria which was developed by National Park Service (NPS).



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